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ABSTRACT

A reorganized version of standards to be utilized for those who are involved with educational evaluation in Brazil was the result of a critical review of evaluation standards which were originally elaborated by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. The conceptual framework for the critical review comprised logical principles. Different methodological procedures--connection, complementation and formulation--were applied during this review. The reorganized version includes 20 standards: six related to utility aspects, three concerned with feasibility, five dealing with propriety features, and six related to accuracy characteristics of evaluations. (Author)

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Evaluation Standards: Reorganization for the Brazilian Educational Reality

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This paper presents the results of the first part of a study which purpose was to reorganize and validate the Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials (Joint Committee, 1981) for the Brazilian reality. These Standards are the result of a pioneer project that brought together a considerable number of American specialists and organizations involved in improving educational evaluation activities. The Standards were originally grouped into four categories: utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. The first one contains eight standards that intend to ensure that an evaluation will provide useful information to involved audiences. The second category comprises three standards that deal with realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal features of an evaluation. The third category includes eight standards which emphasyze ethical and professional aspects of evaluation activities. The fourth category contains eleven standards that call for producing and communicating technically adequate information. For their importance to the evaluation area, the Standards called for further studies, such as this one, which, in addition to its main purpose, disseminated them to a foreign public that, otherwise, would not have easy access to the work of the Joint Committee.

The starting point of this study was the Joint Committee's recommendation that the Standards should "be tried, reviewed and improved, as part of a continuing effort of many persons committed to advancing the practice of evaluation" (Joint Committee, 1981, p. xxi). The information requested by the Joint Committee included, among others, the identification of limitations in individual standards as well as the indication of areas

not covered by them. Thus, the reorganization of the Standards was based upon a critical review of their logical arrangement and content, and intends to provide data for their further refinement and revision.

In the next sections of this paper, the conceptual framework, methodological procedures, results, and educational importance of the study are reported.

Conceptual Framework

A preliminary examination of the evaluation standards revealed two principal areas of problems. The first one was related to the Standards classification into four categories. Due to their main emphasis, some standards could belong to one or another category as well. This problem had already been pointed out by the Joint Committee.

The second area of problems referred to the Standards definition. The repetition of some aspects brought about overlapping standards. Other standards presented incomplete and imprecise definitions in the Portuguese translation. In some cases, technical terms did not have an exact correspondence in English and in Portuguese; in other cases, the same word had different meanings in both languages. As translated into Portuguese, the Standards also lacked aspects which were mentioned in the original version to ensure the categories intentions.

These problems belong to the field of Logics as science. Science is formulated through a form of language and this language is assumed to be a logical one; thus, language is conceived as logics itself (Cerqueira & Oliva, 1980). Consequently, the critical review of the Standards classification was based on logical principles such as (a) mutual exclusion, i.e., the elements of a division or classification must exclude themselves reciprocally; and (b) fundamentum divisionis which guides the division or classification according to the nature of the object being studied (Cohen & Nagel, 1968; Gorsky & Tavants, 1959). It was assumed that these principles also guided the development of the original Standards. However, the need of operating exaustive and excluding divisions of a given object being classified according to its meaningful characteristics remained.

The Standards definitions were revised in the light of a

linguistic perspective. According to Quine (1968), "meanings or ideas which are expressed through linguistic modes of identical appearance and enunciation may radically differ in may cases" (p. 39). So, a translated text may contain words which have indetermined meanings and even may carry out a mistaken understanding about the text focus.

Methodological Procedures

The first part of this study--Standards reorganization--comprised two phases: a critical review that generated the revised version of the standards and the content validation of this version. Different procedures were mainly applied to maintain, exclude, or include elements or standards during the critical review. The procedures were the following: (a) connection--it was the conjunction of two standards considered as of the same kind; (b) complementation--it occurred when the definition of a standard lacked sufficient completeness; in some cases, standards were blended; in others, new elements or elements of other standards were incorporated into another to achieve more objectivity, detailed content, and adequate scope in an attempt to express the standards overview and guidelines more properly; and (c) formulation-- the overall analysis of the categories brought about a new standard which fulfilled the intended scope of a given attribute. In addition, standards descriptors were revised. This was done to make descriptors more adequate to the modified standards or to a category.

After elaborating the revised standards version, its content validity was ascertained by three Professors of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, experts in Educational Evaluation. The purpose of the validation procedure was to obtain clear and adequate statements of evaluation standards to be utilized in Brazil, considering the inoipient stage of development of Educational Evaluation as a professional activity in this country.

Results

The revised version of the evaluation standards comprehends 20 standards. From these, two were maintained in their original form; two resulted from the connection of others; and 15 resulted from complement-

ation. Out of 17 modified standards, ten had their descriptors revised. Only one standard was formulated and included in the Propriety category. Thus, 20 standards were reorganized into the four original groups that correspond to the same essential characteristics which were identified by the Joint Committee (1981) as "necessary and sufficient for sound evaluation in education" (p. 13). Six standards were placed in the first category, Utility; three standards were included in the second category, Feasibility; five standards were included in the Propriety category; and six, in the Accuracy category, the fourth one.

The changes that occurred in the standards are described by category. The inclusion of new elements in the standards had the purpose of avoiding misinterpretations or biased interpretations of the standards once they were utilized.

In the Utility category, the standard concerned with Audience Identification was complemented by elements of the Propriety standards dealing with Human Interactions and Conflict of Interests; elements of this last one also complemented the standard Evaluator Credibility. The standard Information Scope and Selection incorporated elements from its overview and guidelines, and had its descriptor modified to Information Adequacy. This was done in order to make the standard more explicit for less trained users. The standards Valuational Interpretation, Full and Frank Disclosure, Described Purposes and Procedures, Justified Conclusions, and Objective Reporting complemented the Utility standard Report Clarity, reentitled Report Adequacy. The new version of this standard intended to assemble in a single standard, even if more complex, the elements considered as necessary to elaborate an appropriate report evaluation. Also, the standard Report Dissemination was complemented by elements of the Propriety standards Full and Frank Disclosure and Public's Right to Know, while the standard Report Timeliness was complemented by the standard dealing with Evaluation Impact.

In the second category, the Feasibility standard Political Viability was supplied by elements of standards Objective Reporting and Conflict of Interest, while standards Practical Procedures and Cost Effectiveness incorporated new elements and the first one had its descriptor changed to Procedures Viability.

In the third category, Propriety, the standards Formal Obligation and Fiscal Responsibility were more detailed and the second one took a new descriptor--Financial Responsibility. The standard Rights of Human Subjects was complemented by elements of the standard Human Interactions, while the standard Balanced Reporting was complemented by the standard Full and Frank Disclosure; both standards had their descriptors modified to Respect to Public's Rights and Balanced Report, respectively. A new standard was formulated for the Propriety category--Public and Social Responsibility--due to the need of stating a standard concerned with the social commitment of evaluators.

In the fourth category, Accuracy, the standards Object Identification and Context Analysis were maintained as in the original form and in the same category. The connection of the original Accuracy standards Valid Measurement and Reliable Measurement resulted in the standard Valid and Reliable Measurement, while the connection of Analysis of Quantitative Information and Analysis of Qualitative Information originated the standard Analysis of Information. Both standards were kept in the Accuracy category. In these cases, the connection intended to avoid a dissociated use of these standards. The standards Defensible Information Sources and Systematic Data Control incorporated new expliciting elements and received modified descriptors--Selection of Information Sources and Data Control.

The standards Valuational Interpretation, Evaluation Impact, Conflict of Interest, Full and Frank Disclosure, Public's Right to Know, Human Interactions, Described Purposes and Procedures, Justified Conclusions, and Objective Reporting were excluded from the original list but had their elements incorporated into the revised standards. The reorganized standards are presented as follows.

Utility Standards

1. Audience Identification. Audiences involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified, so that their needs and interests can be addressed in the planning of evaluative studies and their personal involvements and interactions with persons associated with the evaluation can be considered and dealt with openly and honestly during the evaluation process.

2. Evaluator Credibility. The persons planning and conducting the evaluation should be trustworthy, politically able as well as competent, so that their findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance from groups involved in or affected by the evaluation.

3. Information Adequacy. Information collected should be carefully selected to address relevant and appropriate questions about the object of the evaluation and should be responsive to the needs and interests of audiences involved in or affected by the evaluation.

4. Report Adequacy. The evaluation report should be consistent and objective, and should clearly describe the object being evaluated and its context, the rationale, purposes, information sources, procedures, limitations, findings of the evaluation, criteria for value judgements used for interpreting findings, and justified conclusions, in a way that the interested and involved audiences will readily understand what was done, why it was done, what information was obtained, what conclusions were drawn, and what recommendations were made.

5. Report Dissemination. According to related principles and statutes, such as those dealing with public safety and the right to privacy, the evaluation report should be openly and honestly disseminated to clients and other right-to-know audiences, so that they can assess and use it.

6. Report Timeliness. Release of reports should be timely, so that audiences interested in or affected by the evaluation are encouraged to best use the reported information.

Feasibility Standards

1. Procedures Viability. The evaluation procedures should be practical, so that disruption is kept to a minimum and should be realistic in relation to context, time, budget, availability of data and of participants without compromising, however, the evaluation results.

2. Political Viability. The evaluation should be planned and conducted with antecipation of the different positions of involved groups, so that they can be equally represented and their cooperation may be obtained and possible attempts by any of these groups to curtail evaluation effects or to bias or misapply the results can be avoided or counteracted.

3. Cost Effectiveness. The evaluation should be economical besides including useful information of sufficient value to justify the resources expended.

Propriety Standards

1. Formal Obligation. Obligations and rights of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when, where, and how much it costs) should be identified, agreed to and formalized in writing, so that these parties are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement, or formally to renegotiate it, or even to cancel it.

2. Respect to Public's Rights. Evaluations should be designed and conducted so that the welfare, dignity and individual privacy of involved and affected persons are respected and protected.

3. Balanced Report. Evaluation reports should be complete, honest and fair in their disclosure of the limitations of an evaluation, as well as in their presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the object under investigation, so that strengths can be built upon and weaknesses corrected.

4. Financial Responsibility. The evaluation allocation and expenditure of resources should demonstrate parsimony, prudence, and ethical responsibility besides the adoption of adequate accountability procedures.

5. Public and Social Responsibility. The evaluation planning and conduction should demonstrate the evaluator's honesty, integrity, and impartiality to avoid that information and conclusions can be manipulated or distorted by personal values, feelings, prejudices or interests of the evaluator.

Accuracy Standards

1. Object Identification. The object of the evaluation (program, project, material) should be sufficiently examined, so that the form(s) of the object being considered in the evaluation can be clearly identified.

2. Context Analysis. The context in which the program, project, or material exists should be examined in enough detail, so that its likely influences on the object can be identified.

3. Selection of Information Sources. The sources of information should be systematically and carefully selected and should have their data-gathering controlled to ensure a sufficiently trustful and defensible information.

4. Valid and Reliable Measurement. The information-gathering instruments and procedures measurement should be carefully chosen or developed and only then implemented in ways that will assure that the information obtained is sufficiently valid and reliable.

5. Data Control. The data collected and processed should be systematically reviewed and corrected, so that they can constitute a sufficiently secure basis for the interpretation of the evaluation results.

6. Analysis of Information. Quantitative and qualitative informations should be appropriately and systematically analyzed according to preestablished criteria to ensure careful, logic, and safe interpretations.

Educational Importance

Evaluation is seen as a means to promote better understanding of educational activities and to improve them. In Brazil, evaluation practice is recent as a professional activity. The first graduate course in this area was created in 1978. Until now, the few studies published have been merely descriptive--they lack mostly technical rigor and founded value judgements. Thus, the status of the evaluation area in Brazil has directly and negatively influenced the decision making process in this country.

The standards reorganization may be considered significant as it may offer not only guiding principles for those who deal with evaluation in Brazil, but also ways of increasing the credibility of educational evaluation studies in this country. The reorganized standards may represent an additional source for the dissemination of the Joint Committee's whole work, not yet translated into Portuguese and, therefore, not accessible to all of those who work with evaluation in Brazil.

The authors believe that this condensed version may provoke immediate understanding of the standards, since it contains standards

definitions now complemented and detailed in Portuguese. Additionally, the reorganized version may motivate probable users to utilize the standards and, hopefully, contribute to the improvement of evaluation quality in Brazil.

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